

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 8, 2004

Chairman Duncan Hunter
House Committee on Armed Services
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Ike Skelton
House Committee on Armed Services
2206 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman John Warner
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Carl Levin
Senate Committee on Armed Services
269 Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Messieurs:

As you prepare to go to Conference, we are writing to express our strong support for the inclusion of the Harkin Amendment in the Department of Defense Authorization Conference Report. This amendment addresses the political programming of the taxpayer-funded Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS).

AFRTS provides an invaluable service to American service members and their families stationed in more than 177 countries and U.S. territories around the world, as well as DOD civilians and their families. AFRTS is intended to broadcast a "touch of home" by providing programming that reflects a cross-section of what is available to stateside audiences.

Recently, AFRTS has been criticized for broadcasting only one political talk show on its uninterrupted voice, or talk radio, service without ensuring that differing viewpoints are adequately represented. The Harkin Amendment, which was accepted in the Senate DOD Authorization bill without objection, reaffirms DOD's existing regulations, which call for AFRTS political programming that is "characterized by its fairness and balance."

Specifically, the Harkin Amendment declares that it is the sense of the Senate:

that the mission statement and policies of the American Forces Radio and Television Service appropriately state the goal of maintaining equal opportunity balance with respect to political programming and that the Secretary of Defense should therefore ensure that these policies are fully being implemented by developing appropriate methods of oversight to ensure presentation of all sides of important public questions with the fairness and balance envisioned by the Department of Defense throughout the American Forces Radio and Television Service system.

Fairness and balance are principles which are at the heart of American democracy, and we believe that they should be reflected in broadcasting to those who are protecting the values and principles for which America stands.

We strongly urge the Conferees to retain the Harkin Amendment in the DOD Authorization Conference Report.

Thank you and with kindest regards, we are

Sincerely,



STENY H. HOYER



ROSA DeLAURO



JOHN SPRATT



ROBERT MENENDEZ



ELLEN TAUSCHER



JOHN LEWIS



RAHM EMANUEL



LOUISE M. SLAUGHTER